



Food Security & Canada's Aging Population



Emily Domingues, NM
Nutrition Services Consultant

We rarely associate Canada with food deprivation and food insecurity. But, as our population is aging, and the proportion of people aged 65 and older is increasing the prevalence of those in older populations experiencing food insecurity is rising. Food insecurity not only focuses on the shortage of food but the uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate food ^{1,2}.

Food Insecurity in Seniors Population

Even with rising food insecurity among seniors, there is limited research on the topic. Existing research examines how older populations may experience food insecurity as compared to younger populations. Food insecurity in older populations can be linked to different aging-related factors, including, physiological, physical, social, and economic challenges related to consuming food. Along with these challenges comes the risk of malnutrition.



Another challenge faced by older adults aging is accessing resources that support health and nutrition. Older populations are often not prioritized when it comes to public policy and distribution of community and healthcare services. While there is a large variation in how people define health that is not necessarily linked to chronological age, underserving older populations can have a large impact on their health, independence and quality of life. Concerns about food insecurity in young people is typically framed as an investment, while concerns about food insecurity for those in older populations are framed as expensive and draining on public resources².

Public resources and charitable food organizations are available; however accessibility may be limited and may not meet the needs of seniors. The types of food and quantities available are unreliable, especially for senior populations who may have multiple dietary restrictions or require a specialized therapeutic or texture modified diet. Seniors are also less likely to access these resources for other reasons, like perceptions of what forms of charitable food is deemed socially acceptable². Although these resources have proven to be helpful to seniors in need, they do not fully address the health and economic situation of this population.

The following are resources that can help support those seniors experiencing food insecurity.

Nutrition Eat Right

Ontario: This program connects you to a Registered Dietitian who can provide free advice that can improve your quality of life. Visit the Eat Right Ontario website to access additional resources, including 'Nutri-e screen', an interactive web-based nutrition support tool targeted at older adults. There may be other services available within the community that deliver prepared meals to seniors including Meals on Wheels or Heart to Home.

Dietitians of Canada: This association of food and nutrition professionals is committed to the health and well-being of Canadians. They produce a variety of resources that can help with making choices around senior's nutrition.

Sysco Canada's Nutrition Services Malnutrition

Toolkit: which focuses on practical tips to address senior malnutrition & unintentional weight loss within your communities. For more information contact your Sysco representative.

References:

1. Statistics Canada. (n.d.). *11 Food insecurity in Canadian households I*. Food insecurity in Canadian households. Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2000004/article/5796-eng.pdf>
2. Leroux, J. (n.d.). *Household food insecurity among older people in Canada: The exploration of a public health issue rendered invisible*. Home. Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/24861>